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Pulpit Preaching

Vol. XIII, No. 12 DECEMBER, 1961

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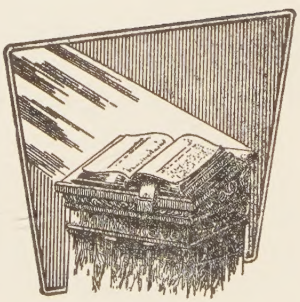

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

At this season when we reverently remember of the birth of our Lord and, inspired by this remembrance, look toward the new year, each of those associated with **Pulpit Preaching** prayerfully wish for our readers God's abundant mercies and blessings upon their seasonal preaching and church responsibilities.

When we recently invited our readers to send to us the names of prospective subscribers, we were heartened that many generously responded. To enlarge the circle of our readers will be made possible, we believe, not through extensive advertising, which is financially impossible, but through enthusiastic recommendations by our present readers. We are gratified when readers so express themselves to pastors who are unacquainted with this periodical.

The themes for this issue emphasize Christmas and New Year preaching. The themes for the first issue of 1962—marking our fifteenth year of publication—will be "The Heart of Christian Prayer" and Squaring Our Lives with Christ's Requirements."

———o———

BOOKS FOR PULPIT PREACHING

Men of Fire by Walter Russell Bowie retells with imaginative vividness and pertinence the stories of twenty-six torchbearers of the Gospel from the times of Peter, Paul, and Polycarp to the modern generation which is represented by Schweitzer,

(Continued on Page 26)

WORTH QUOTING

E. Paul Hovey

The qualities of character, hidden or buried, are revealed eventually even as the quality of a building is revealed under the stress of time and storm. When we do less than our best we cheat ourselves. We are the architects and builders of our own characters and must of necessity dwell within them.

—George E. Mayo

* * *

The peace of great doors be for you. —Carl Sandburg

* * *

When personality grows beyond its environment, we must find release either by shattering walls or by finding an exit. We have to go on and out and up to new horizons as we grow . . . We talked of the peaceful qualities of large doors, the restriction and friction of narrow ones, of those locked seemingly without keys, and those we forget to open. We deplored slamming doors in anger so they could not be opened again and recommended the oil of humor that eases the opening of many. Of course, we did not omit the few doors that must always be closed, wistfully, reluctantly, softly, but firmly and be marked with a sign, **"Do not disturb."**

—Inez Hunt

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Freedom of communication guaranteed by the constitution offers large doors, small doors, wide doors, narrow doors. Many are open, many are closed. Therefore, a tremendous challenge is ours and will continue to be

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Pulpit Preaching

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THE REAL REASON FOR CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

THE GREATEST GIFT

Everett W. Palmer

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you mighty become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9
Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15

Christmas is many things. It is memories, bright and golden, that come singing up the highway of the years. It is joy that heals the heart with gladness. It is wisdom that makes commonplace duties of every day glow in Heaven's light. It is hope standing sturdy and shining midst the shambles of our folly and despair. It is peace born of man's reconciliation with God and his brothers. It is love that breaks the power of evil and makes goodness winsome. It is holiness that brings Heaven near and captures our hearts for the Highest.

Christmas is this and more, more than our little minds can grasp or find words to describe because it comes to us as the greatest of all gifts, God's gift of Himself in Jesus born of Mary.

The meaning of the Incarnation is an ocean in which we can dip only a teacup of understanding. But let us bring that teacup and fill it to the brim. Why, let us ask, is the birth of Christ the greatest of all gifts to us? What does such a gift require of us?

I

Certainly we can begin with a point of agreement. Jesus Christ is the greatest gift because of His unsurpassed influence for good. Every person among us has been benefited in ways beyond telling because nineteen centuries ago a Babe was born in Bethlehem called Jesus. That birth was and is the hinge of history. Nothing has happened since Creation itself of comparable significance as a power for good.

He has inspired earth's noblest art and music, architecture and literature. Wherever He has gone life has leaped into beauty.

He has commanded the allegiance of the world's best minds and encouraged establishment of mankind's greatest institutions of learning. Wherever He has gone men's minds have been kindled.

He has been the example and incentive for those who have befriended the friendless, championed the oppressed, liberated the captives, healed the sick, cared for the poor. Visit any place on earth where the plight of people is most deplorable, and where least can be gained of material rewards. Rarely need you look far until you come upon someone of superior natural gifts, excellent education, and kindly spirit at work there, spending himself for human good in toil and zeal no money could buy. Ask him why he is there, working for a pittance, burying himself in loving service for people the world has forgotten, and he will tell you of Jesus Christ. Wherever He has gone true brotherhood has uplifted and ennobled life.

Take from the world everything of hope and love given to it directly or beauty and of truth, joy and freedom,

indirectly by Jesus Christ. It would be like stripping a garden of flowers or the sky of stars.

Years ago Dr. James A. Francis, when minister of the First Baptist Church of Los Angeles, gave this tribute to Jesus: "Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

"I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth so powerfully as has that One Solitary Life."

There is reason to celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. He is the greatest of gifts because of His influence for good in history.

II

Also, He is the greatest of gifts because He best reveals what God is, and what man is and ought to be.

In Him we meet God, face to face, heart to heart. Philosophy points toward God and theology defines God. They speak of Him as the Unmoved Mover, First Cause, or Cosmic Mind. They describe Him as Immanent and Transcendent, as Omnipotent and Omniscient. But necessary and admirable as are the speculations of philosophy and the abstractions of theology, they do not yield the highest and most satisfying knowledge of God. Few of us are moved to worship an abstraction. We don't readily say our prayers to a syllogism. But when we meet God in the face of Jesus Christ, that wins the mind, bends the knee, and feeds the heart.

And what we see of God in Jesus Christ is not merely winsome. It is our best knowledge of God. God is revealed by all His creation. There are the far-flung stars whose light may travel ten thousand years to fashion the glory which covers us by night; they tell about God. There is the intricate perfection of the human eye; it tells about God. The love of good parents opens a window toward God, as does a tiny babe clinging to our hand. But the Creator is best known by His best creation, Jesus Christ. In the perfection of His life, the wisdom of His teaching, the power of His resurrection, we are given our best knowledge of God. What we see satisfies both mind and heart. He said of Himself, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." We can neither deny nor improve upon that.

In Jesus Christ we have not only our best knowledge about God, but of man, too. In the pure light of His Presence we see ourselves as we are. Every device by which we would deceive ourselves and others fails. The camouflage falls off. We are compelled to face the truth about ourselves. Like Simon Peter, at first we would fall to our knees, pleading, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But in that truth, humiliating though it be, is the beginning of deliverance from the evil that enslaves us.

In Jesus Christ we see not only what we are, but what we meant to be. We look upon the purpose for our being, the goal for our living.

Pasternak, in his **Dr. Zhivago,** has this to say about the birth of Jesus Christ:

"Rome was a flea market of borrowed gods and conquered peoples, a bargain basement on two floors . . . a mass of filth . . . heavy wheels without spokes, eyes sunk in fat, sodomy, double chins, illiterate emperors, fish fed on the flesh of learned slaves . . . all crammed into the passages of the Coliseum, and all wretched.

"And, then, into this tasteless heap of gold and marble, He came, light and clothed in an aura, emphatically human, deliberately provincial, Galilean, and at that moment gods and nations ceased to be and man came

into being—man the carpenter, man the shepherd with his flock of sheep at sunset, man who does not sound in the least proud, man thankfully celebrated in all the cradle songs of mothers and in all the picture galleries the world over."

One example is worth a million words. In Jesus of Nazareth we look upon what we know ought to be. We see in Him the meaning of life, the goal we were born to pursue.

He is the greatest gift because in Him we best see what God is, what we are, and what we are meant to be.

III

But we dare not stop here. It is not enough to admire Jesus and say, "Lord, Lord!" Christianity is not an admiration society. It is a fellowship of dedicated hearts. To be given such a gift entails an obligation no less than the obedience of a loving heart.

Many have admired Jesus Christ. From the records it is apparent that Pilate admired Him, perhaps as no other person he had met. But he stopped with admiration. So, Jesus of Nazareth was sent to a Cross and Pilate is forever remembered as — Pilate. Admiration is not enough.

In an old medieval church, it is said, are carved these words:

"Ye call Me Master and obey Me not,
Ye call Me Light and see Me not,
Ye call Me Way and walk Me not,
Ye call Me wise and follow Me not,
Ye call Me fair and love Me not,
Ye call Me rich and ask Me not,
Ye call Me eternal and seek Me not,
Ye call Me gracious and trust Me, not
Ye call Me noble and serve Me not,
Ye call Me just and fear Me not,
If I condemn you, blame Me not."

It is well on Christmas Sunday to hail the incomparable excellence of Christ, the greatest of gifts to us the sons of men. But admiration is not enough. For such a gift but one response is right, that is the dedication of our life to Him and our hearts in His service.

Is this surrender of our heart to Christ postponed business? Something we have not yet quite got around to do? Have we been saying, "Yes, but at some future time . . . after I finish school . . . after I get married . . . after I get settled down . . .?

Our hearts are made for Him, made to be His throne. We are empty men, stuffed with straw, chasing after phantoms until at last we turn from our silly suicidal worship of self and give ourselves to Him. What we lose is good riddance. What we gain is life abundant and everything that makes Christmas a shining gladness.

NEVER AGAIN THE SAME

J. R. Brokhoff, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Charlotte, N. C.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country another way. Matthew 2:12

When some people enter our lives, we are never quite the same again. When a maiden finds "the" man of her life or when a young man finds the most wonderful girl in the world, he and she are never the same again. When a young husband and wife get their first baby and the household is turned upside down with the baby as king of the home, they are ready to agree that their home has never been the same since the baby's arrival.

When a youth comes under the influence of a dynamic teacher, he, being inspired by the teacher's ideas and personality, may change the entire direction of his life. Sometimes a business establishment is taken over by a new and efficient executive. He makes so many changes and improvements that the business is never the same again.

If this can happen over and over with ordinary people, how much more did it happen with the coming of Jesus into the world! The drama, "Family Portrait," is based on the life of Jesus. In the final scene the friends of Jesus have just come home from Calvary. Here and there are small groups huddled together in a state of mourning and weeping. Mary Magdalene, in the center of the stage, says while the spotlight shines on her, "Because he lived, the world will never be the same again." And it hasn't been! Jesus' advent made such an impact on the world that it has never recovered. When He was born more than nineteen centuries ago, an outside world invaded ours. When Jesus was born, eternity crashed into time, the Infinite became finite, God became man.

Jesus caused a tremendous change to take place in the world. Men explain this by dividing the world's history into B. C. and A. D. Today Jesus still brings revolutionary changes to all who confront Him. It was that way with the Wise Men. They went to the manger with their gifts to worship the new-born King. When it was time for them to return home, the text says that they did not go back the same way. They did not resume life as it once was. They did not fall back into the same rut of life. They returned another way. They were different men. This has been happening ever since. Men who come face to face with Jesus and kneel in adoration before His presence leave Him with a newness of life.

I

But you may ask, "How is the world different because Jesus was born?" Because Jesus lived, the world has a new scale of values. There was something new and different about Jesus. His ways and teachings were not the world's. He gave men a new idea of what true greatness was. While on earth He challenged men to follow His concept of values. He said: "You have heard it said of old, but I say unto you. A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another even as I have loved you." What was new about it was "as I have loved you." Often He told His hearers that He gave them an example that they should do as He had done.

Since Jesus came the world's values have been changed from cruelty to compassion. Before Christ — and today without Christ — the world was hard and cruel and crude. Emphasis was placed upon strength and roughness. "Be tough" was the slogan. Women, as a weaker sex, were subordinated to the level of property and could be bought and sold. Weak infants or unwanted females were left on barren hillsides to be eaten by dogs or to perish from the elements.

Jesus turned the world to the idea of compassion. When He saw a crowd of folks without food, He had compassion on them. When a woman was about to be stoned to death for adultery, He alone had mercy on her. In His parable of the Good Samaritan, He taught that showing mercy was the chief responsibility of man. Consequently Christianity is associated with tenderness and love — the tenderness of a new-born child. It expresses itself in works of mercy and love. The poor are fed. The naked are clothed. The sick are visited. The troubled are helped. It can be truly said that every school and every hospital, every home for the aged, every orphanage, every

institution of welfare existing today is the result of the influence of Jesus upon the world. Directly or indirectly, He inspired men to raise such buildings and found such organizations to care for the weak and helpless.

Moreover, Jesus changed the world's scale of values by turning arrogance to humility. Before Christ men loved to strut and brag. Such men think of greatness in terms of egotism, honor, and fame. He whose chest is full of medals is the great man of society. Men without Christ are arrogant and vain. But Jesus taught that the chief virtue was humility. He demonstrated this by His own life. He humbled Himself to be born of a virgin. He assumed sinful human nature and subjected Himself to the laws of man. He forgot His prerogatives and lived a life of perfect obedience, even the obedience to go to the cross. His life teaches that he who steps is greater than he who struts.

Autocracy was changed to service when Jesus came on earth. Before Christ came, men believed that greatness was in having power over men. The height of ambition was to rule and to have as many servants as possible. It was to sit on a throne; it was to dominate and dictate that made a man outstanding. After Christ came, the world saw that serving was greater than being served. Jesus taught, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister." To teach His Disciples this truth, He took a towel and a basin of water and washed His disciples' feet. He then told them to do to one another what He did for them. He persuaded the world that he who is first must be last, he who would be great must be a servant.

II

The Wise Men returned home another way. Christ had made a difference in their thinking about God. Likewise, Jesus' appearance in the world has changed men's thinking about God and established a new relationship between God and man. Religion without Christ is one of dread and fear. Emphasis is placed upon fear of God. He is pictured as some mighty potentate sitting on top of the universe, full of justice and wrath. He sends evil upon men to punish them for violating His pleasure. Man's chief end in life seemed to be to placate this angry God. Prayers were said continually to appeal for clemency and to persuade God to turn away His anger. Ceremonies were held to please Him and to turn away His threatened punishment. Sacrifices of man's best, even at times his children, were offered over and over to placate a ferocious God.

Moreover, religion without Christ is drudgery. God is considered a mighty law-giver. He has absolute power and His will must be done. He has given laws that must be obeyed. This makes religion a matter of good works. There are laws that have to be fulfilled at any price. Religion is in terms of duty, "must," and "ought." Like Sisyphus of ancient mythology, man is cursed by having to do something he cannot do. Sisyphus had to roll a huge stone up the side of a mountian. When he just about reached the top, it rolled back again. This happened every time and was to last through eternity. What drudgery and slavery!

Jesus changed all that when He came to earth. He brought us a religion of light and life. As light, God becomes knowable. God identified Himself with Jesus. In Jesus we see the Father, full of grace and truth. As the light of the world, Jesus reveals man, too. We now see ourselves as we are — sinners, of course, but now redeemed sinners. Man is a potential child of God. He has an inherent dignity as God's highest creation. Because of Christ, we are no longer in the darkness of superstition and ignorance. The nature of God and

man is revealed.

Because of Christ, we have a religion of life also. This life came as a result of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. He brought God's life to us. In the cross we see the love of God, and now for us God becomes lovable. By His sacrificial death, we are able to share the life of God. And this is life indeed! God is our Friend. We talk and walk together. This life with God is full and free and abundant.

III

The world has never been the same since Jesus lived. The Wise Men went home another way in the sense that they now had hope for a better world. They reasoned: "Since the Messiah has come, He will establish the Kingdom on earth. This is the realization of our dreams."

The Wise Men were justified in their hope, because the world has changed to the better. Christ has turned the world upside down over these past nineteen centuries. Go back to the first century of the Christian era. This was the period when the Roman mobs jammed the arenas to watch gladiators fight to death. This was the time when helpless people were thrown to hungry ferocious animals brought from Africa. While men were killed in cold blood and women and children were eaten alive, the common people shouted with glee. This for them was great sport! Because of the Christian influence, the gladiatorial combats were stopped and the arenas today are in ruins.

There was a time when men settled their differences by dueling. If an offense was made, the offender was challenged to meet at the crack of dawn and shoot it out at fifty paces. Foolishly men were shot or badly wounded for the slightest reasons. But dueling fell before the forward progress of Christianity in the world.

Just a little more than a century ago one of mankind's worst plagues fell before the power of Christ. It was human slavery. In apparently good conscience men kept other human beings as slaves and used and misused them as they pleased. But the leaven of the gospel would not permit this to exist forever. The time came when the conscience of man made the world feel that slavery was a grievous sin. Under Lincoln and Wilberforce slavery was outlawed, and to this day slavery is non-existent in the Christian world.

Because of Christ we can have hope for our generation. We are facing tough problems and serious issues. One of them is war. "Why," some ask, "do we have wars when we have had Christianity for twenty centuries?" It may appear as though Christianity and the power of Christ have been helpless before this curse of man. But just give the gospel a little more time! The mills of God grind slowly. More than ever men feel that war must end. At present, by our arms race in atomic weapons, we are dancing the dance of death. But we know very exactly that in a future war there will be no victors, only the annihilated.

Moreover, better than ever we know the way to peace. The path to peace is goodwill. This was announced when Jesus was born. Peace on earth would come to a world full of goodwill. When we are willing to pay the price of righteous and godly living, the world will go forward to a state of peace.

A second serious problem facing us today is racial tension. Is there any hope in this area? Let it be said at the beginning that wonderful progress in race relations has been made in the past century. American Negroes have made miraculous progress in the last fifty years in political, educational, economic, and social fields. On the other hand, much ground remains to be covered. It is said that Sunday at 11 o'clock is the most segregated hour in America. That may be true, but under the Christian impact the

walls of segregation are badly cracking. These walls are doomed to fall eventually. There is a Christian ferment causing the foundations of the walls to heave and break apart the stones. The spirit of Christ is the spirit of love and brotherhood. This is something that cannot be forced upon a people or an individual. It works slowly but surely. Give the influence of Christ and His Church another generation and then see what has happened to racial prejudice and injustice! There is hope in Christ.

The basis for our hope is in the possibility of man to change. It is trite to repeat that man is the key to a better society. Nevertheless it is true. Our problem is man, not his weapons nor his machines. Make man new and society is new. Redeem the individual and you redeem the world.

Christ is the only power on earth that can change a man. He can transform and make new the worst kind of a person. Yet you may wonder at this. You are thinking of a delinquent who is incorrigible. He responds to nothing. He refuses cooperation. Can he be made over? Or you may be thinking of a drunkard. He will not stop drinking. He will not listen to appeals from loved ones or friends. He does not want to be helped. What can Christ do with a man like that? Christ can do anything and everything with people like these providing they will repent and open their hearts to the Spirit of God. This happened with others. Cephas the reed became Peter the rock. Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle. Augustine the profligate came to be Augustine the saint. What happened then can happen now, even to you. If you let Christ come into your life, you will never be the same again. Your change to the good is the basis of our hope for a better world.

Every person leaves the world never quite the same. It is a little better or worse. To leave the world a little better, you must let Christ be born in your life. As the world was divided into B. C. and A. D. because Jesus was born, so an individual life can now be living in either B. C. or A. D. Fear is living in a state of B. C.; faith is in A. D. Worry is B. C.; peace is A. D. Hatred is living Before Christ; love is living in the year of our Lord. On which side of history are you living? Has Christ been born in your heart? If so, could it be that He needs to be born in you more fully today? Then humbly pray in the words of Phillips Brooks —

> O holy child of Bethlehem,
> Descend on us, we pray.
> Cast out our sin and enter in,
> Be born in us today.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AT CHRISTMAS

Clarence J. Forsberg, First Methodist Church, Eugene, Oregon

Sometime ago it occurred to me that there is a rather striking similarity between the story of the birth of Jesus as we have it in the New Testament and the spirit and mood of Christmas observances in our own time. As I thought about the New Testament version, I realized more than I ever had before how many supporting characters in that drama could properly be called "searchers." There were the three wise men from the east, searching for the answer to a strange riddle posed by a new star. There were the shepherds, summoned from their fields at midnight by the angels, searching for a child "in swaddling clothes." To add just the right amount of suspense to the story, there was old King Herod, the villain of the piece, searching for this new threat to his military-political power. And behind the scenes, as it were, there was the age-old unending search of the Jewish people for some token or sign from God that their

deliverance was at hand in the person of a new Messiah. You might almost call it the Great Search. While some of them found what they were looking for and others missed it, all of their searching was concerned with what was happening in the little town of Bethlehem.

Without taxing your imagination too much, I submit that our observance of Christmas today might well be called the Great Search. What are you looking for this Christmas? There are some answers that we could reasonably anticipate.

If you ask the youngsters what they are looking for, they can probably give you a very exact answer. We hide mysterious packages round the house in closets and attics, trying to disguise their contents. But this is a game that our children play with us. They allow us to believe that we are fooling them. Everyone at my house at least knows what to look for. All of us, young and old, look for Christmas presents from those we love: some token of deep and genuine sentiment. That, at least, is one answer.

But beneath and behind this search for just the right gifts to give, and to receive, there is another kind of search that goes on at Christmas, harder to define and to put into words. I suppose it is really a search for a lost innocence. It is the nostalgic search for something that we vaguely associate with childhood, the times that used to be and cannot return, something that is gone and will never come back. I suppose that the psychologists would call this the longing for security, for the warmth and protection we once felt from our parents, but which we had to give up as we grew out of childhood into maturity. I don't think that we do ourselves any great harm in this attempt to recreate the atmosphere and mood of bygone days, but it is really not very realistic.

Four very eminent psychiatrists published an article recently in the New York Times, which dealt with still another aspect of the search that goes on at Christmas. Their thesis was that one of the unwritten laws of society is that at this time of the year everyone has to be happy. Obviously some of us simply cannot be happy, no matter how desperately we try. Our happiness is not a matter of circumstances; it goes much deeper than that. So we are caught between our own feelings and the pressure of society, and pay a high price emotionally and physically. The compulsive search for happiness can be a very trying thing, not only for the searcher, but for everyone else around him. This I suppose is why some people drink too much at Christmas; others eat too much, another facet of the same problem; still others spend too much, almost as if they would never have a chance to spend another dime. A twenty-two year old patient, according to the doctors, divorced and suffering from a deprived background, suffered regularly from crying spells and the hives at the holiday season. It was her way of reacting against all the seasonal emphasis on togetherness and joy. A former parishioner of mine, one of my dearest friends, an alcoholic who has made a much better than average adjustment to this problem, confessed to me once that she always dreaded to see Christmas come because it was the hardest time of the year for her and her particular problem. We might do well to ask ourselves what we are looking for this Christmas. Am I trying to conform to some unwritten law of society that decrees a forced gaiety? Or am I going to settle instead for that inward peace and contentment that follows when I have come to terms with my own problems, my circumstances, and my limitations?

The search goes on. I suppose there are a dozen or more different ways to answer the question posed in the

topic of this sermon. However, it seems to me that there is something infinitely more important to look for at Christmas than just a second childhood, or an artificial happiness. I propose that what we need to look for is the real meaning of the event. Maybe you would want to state it differently, but it seems to me that Christmas is God's answer to our human dilemma. This is what the whole story is all about. This is what we celebrate in song and verse and corporate worship. This is the way in which God proposes to resolve the problems we confront.

I

First of all I must try to say in a few words what our human dilemma is. In the simplest terms it is our unwillingness or our inability to get along with our fellowmen, at a time when survival depends upon it.

One of the most intriguing aspects of television is the scope and the flexibility of the camera. I'm thinking of a public spectacle, such as a football game, where one moment the camera will encompass a great crowd of people and in the next moment be zeroed in on just one individual. It doesn't matter which camera you use; the problem is essentially the same. Whether you are surveying the whole vast human scene or concentrating on the individual, you see man estranged from his fellowman, society divided into a hundred different camps, men at cross-purpose with t h e i r neighbors, families divided against themselves. Most of the time we employ the close-up lens and think in terms of our individual situation. Today I would like to paint the problem on the bigger canvass, bearing in mind that human nature is the basic problem whether you are talking about one man or a whole race.

The human dilemma is our unwillingness or our inability to get along with our fellowmen at a time when our very survival is bound up in one package. There isn't a week that goes by but what we get some fresh intimation of how wide spread the problem is. There was a time, of course, when we enjoyed the luxury of thinking that what happened in foreign countries, where people spoke strange languages, could not possibly affect us and our welfare. Today we know better. What happens in some tiny remote nation in the farthest corner of the world has reprecussions in Moscow and Washington.

When we talk about our dilemma, we are speaking about more than just the survival of a nation, or a culture, or a way of life. We are talking now about the survival of human life itself. Harrison Brown, a geochemist who teaches at the California Institute of Technology, had some blunt words to say some time ago in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. "If I were a cosmic gambler," he wrote, "watching the earth from afar and studying the present behavior patterns of people and nations, I would be inclined to give rather substantial odds that sooner or later industrial civilization will perish in a nuclear holocaust. If I were to place bets on the time in which this might happen, I would say almost certainly within the next century, quite possibly within the next twenty-five years, conceiveably within the next five years." How old will your children be twenty-five years from now?

Try to imagine two planes, one carrying the soviet peoples and the other ourselves, with the two planes on a collision course. The uncommitted nations are gathered on the ground beneath the point of collision and u n l e s s something intervenes, there will be no survivors. Our human dilemma lies in our unwillingness or our inability to get along with our fellow men at a time when everybody's survival depends upon it.

II

That brings me to the second thing I want to say: God's answer looks

as simple as man's dilemma appears complex.

God's answer was not a new set of rules. Thank God for that. The Jewish people had all the rules that anyone could ask for, more in fact than anyone could possibly keep. God's answer did not come in the form of a new ritual. It was not just a way of saying your prayers or observing the sacraments. God's answer did not come in the form of a creed. The creeds came much later as men began to try to say what they believed and found that old tendency to dispute and debate with their fellow men. God's answer came in the form of a person.

One day two converts to Christianity were sitting in a prison cell. There was an earthquake, and their jailor was frightened that they might have escaped. When he saw them still there quiet, poised, and unalarmed, making no effort to run away, he knew that he needed to know their secret. He asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Their answer was a classic in simplicity and it has never been forgotten. They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved!" What did they mean? What was there to believe? Did they mean to believe that a man by that name had once lived? Obviously it was more than that. Did they mean to believe that he had died? Well, other men died, some on the same kind of cross on which he died. What they meant was simply, believe in Him! Believe in his kind of love. Believe in his kind of love. Believe in his kind of gentleness. Believe in his kind of quietness.

Is it reasonable to say to our world today, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved?" Well, it is and it isn't. It isn't too reasonable if by that you mean, "Believe everything my church has taught me to believe about Jesus." Not even the other Christians in the world can believe everything about Jesus that you happen to believe, let alone the Moslems, and the Hindus, and the Jews, and the other non-Christians. On the other hand, it would seem reasonable to say to the world, "Believe in his kind of love and you will be saved." There we can stand on common ground, regardless of our theological differences.

How did He love us? Who can count the ways? His love was not a shallow, superficial kind of sentiment that hoped for the best in others and was blind to their faults. Instead, he loved people who were unable or even unwilling to love Him in return. That takes some doing, as some of us have discovered for ourselves. He loved even when it meant suffering to love. That is even harder to do, except for mothers who love their children. We will love our neighbors and even our enemies up to a point, but not beyond. We are not willing to love if it means sacrifice, or self-denial, or personal suffering. But in Jesus you see this willingness to suffer, and by his suffering he saves people. "One of the mysteries is that by the suffering of people who really do not deserve to suffer, people who perhaps should are often changed and saved."

In other words, here was an absolutely unself-centered life. No vanity, no petty jealousy, no ingrown concern, no inordinate ambition, no need to run the show — none of the things that frustrate us in our relationships from our homes all the way up to the General Assembly of the United Nations. Instead, there was a natural, out-flowing love for his disciples and his friends, for his fellowmen and even his enemies, and above all for God. It is that kind of love that can save the world.

General Omar Bradley said on one occasion: "Missiles will bring anti-missiles, and anti-missiles will bring anti-anti-missiles. If we will o n l y come to the realization that it must be worked out, whatever it may mean

even to such sacred traditions as absolute national sovereignty — I believe that we can somehow, somewhere, and perhaps through some as yet undiscovered world thinker and leader find a workable solution!" What if it turned out that the answer were already here in a person whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, and we missed it because it was too familiar and too near to us?

Here is something to look for at Christmas. Not new toys. Not new gadgets. Not new creature comforts. We have the uncomfortable feeling that these are not enough now. Instead, a new answer, God's answer, to our human dilemma, incarnate in a tiny babe, lying in a manger, whose name is on all our lips and in all our hearts.

MIRACLE OF A MANGER

Robert B. Wallace, First Baptist Church, Los Angeles, California

When out of the quiet darkness there appeared an angel, it is not surprising that the shepherds would be frightened. They were surprised. Yet, this was precisely the thing they were looking for. The routine of their task had forced them to live with themselves. For men this is an impossible task. The more we try to live with ourselves the more discouraged we become. The shepherds had longed for some answer. They shared the hope of the prophets that someone would come to give new direction to their living.

Our sentiments tend to make us look back on that night as a lovely night. We forget that there were many things unlovely about the scene. Some were cold that night, especially Joseph and Mary as they sought shelter for the child in a place where the cold night air mixed with the sour smells of a stable.

For three men out in the fields, it was a dark night — darkness in the skies but also darkness within. Three men were lost in their own thoughts. What else was there to think about but the past with all its memories and all its guilt? They thought of the future. There was hope, but it was dim. There was a past and a future. But the greatest problem was that they did not know how to live in the now.

You and I are those shepherds. To us who are lost in ourselves, wanting some light for our day, the angel comes and invites us to Bethlehem.

I

The first shepherd we will call Benjamin. His name matters little. It can be Mr. Brown or Mrs. Smith. Benjamin thought of his past. He tried to recall one person he really loved. The clearness of the night air seemed to bring a new honesty to Benjamin, as he admitted to himself that he was the only one he ever really loved .What mattered to him in any friendship was the profit that was in it for himself. The more he thought about his problem the more he realized that he didn't know how to love. For so long he had loved only himself that he had forgotten how to love others. His self-love had made him lonely. His loneliness made him pity himself, and soon he found he was hating himself. If one doesn't know how to love and can't find the answer within himself, then where will he turn? On that night of nights futility filled the mind of this shepherd. Finally, in the words of W. H. Auden, he cried, "We who must die demand a miracle." Escape from this self-centered living is not in myself; it is in a miracle.

Suddenly the angel appeared with an invitation to see a miracle. With haste they ran to the city. As they ran the word "Saviour" must have echoed in his mind. So, this is the Saviour! Will he be able to save me

from my self-centeredness?

Benjamin looked down at the crude bed. Is this the miracle? How can a baby save me? It is God that must save me. No one else can do it. His eyes might have closed at that point. Ah, but who is God? How can I see His face? I can neither understand Him nor myelf. There must be someone to tell me what God is like and who I am. The shepherd opened his eyes and they fell on the face of the baby.

I have often wondered if these shepherds followed Jesus through his thirty-three years and if they were there when he was crucified. If Benjamin did follow him he would have realized the dream the face of the baby brought to his mind. He would have found one who was his Saviour because he taught him to love. He would have discovered love to be no longer an abstract idea but a reality.

The agonizing loneliness was gone. The miracle had happened — the miracle that was to save men from their self-centeredness, the miracle that was to show men both who God is and what man ought to be.

II

The second shepherd we will call Peter. We could call him Dr. Williams, Mrs. Baker, or Sally. As the shepherds sat in silence that night, Peter counted his sheep. When this was done, he counted his change-purse. Most every night he did this. This seemed to be the only thing which really mattered to him. He was the type of man who paved his own path through life. He knew no one else would provide for him. And so he set as his life goal the possession of things. Peter was a respectable person. He seldom wronged others, and all envied his ambition. But inwardly Peter was filled with hatreds. He hated those who stood in his way of achievement. People were tools to be used in achieving his goals. His was an impersonal universe, for people didn't matter. Everyone existed for himself.

Peter knew deep down inside that was no life. It was cold and shallow. Each day was met with an empty feeling. One can't be happy in a world where people don't count, and even God is someone to be used as when sacrifices were offered in the temple. Such a life is barren. To escape from it is hard. When one has made the possession of things his goal, it is hard to change. Where is there an escape? We who must die demand a miracle! Only a miracle can save one from this sterile life.

As the shepherds ran to the city of Bethlehem, Peter was asking over and over again in his mind, Is this the miracle that will save me? At the end of their race was a manger. What a strange finish to a desperate race to escape an impersonal world of things. As they gathered around that crude maternity ward, Peter noticed that suddenly it didn't matter how much one had. Shepherds knelt beside wise and rich scholars of the East. Here they were all equal. What is it that is so different about this place, he wondered. Then it came to him. Here persons count. And each one here counts for what he is and not for what he possesses.

The miracle has happened, and it had come in a person. In an impersonal world seeking status and money there comes a child in a manger. Suddenly all of the other goals and ambitions in life fade into the shadows. It is all that really matters.

Ours is a world where everything is an It. Things become our goals. And even persons become an It because we use them to achieve our goals. Look upon the manger where for once in your life everything is personal and not an It, where you and the person next to you and the Jesus you worship are all that is important. The miracle had happened because God came in a person.

III

The third shepherd we shall call Andrew. You can give him any name, your own if you like. On that quiet night Andrew sat remembering. He looked at the city beyond. He didn't see the approaching star, for he thought only of his own guilt. The city reminded him of that sin which he had committed there. His guilt haunted him. The nights were especially long. The sheep were settled, and there was nothing to do but to live with his past. How can God forgive my sins? How would I know if He did? He is so far away and so impersonal. If He were only close enough so that I might hear him speak to me. Ah, but He is the Father of Abraham and not of Andrew. So, Andrew's days pressed on without any purpose. His own sin clouded what image of God he did have. We who must die demand a miracle.

The news to go to Bethlehem came as a suppressed dream. Is it possible that there we will find the Saviour? Can he save me from my guilt? Andrew looked in the manger. If this is really the Son of God, then God has come to be my contemporary. I need no longer only remember Abraham's God, for now He walks beside me. His love, His forgiveness will be tangible. He is come to live for me. If Andrew followed Jesus for those thirty-three years, he one day added, He also died for me to live as a contemporary with man. The Man of Nazareth has become the man of America, the man of Africa, the man of Asia.

This is not history. We are those shepherds. Amidst the tinsel and the cash register, the selfishness and loneliness, there is a small light that leads us to a manger. It is the miracle that forgives, that gives hope to the future, and meaning to the present. Because there is a miracle in the manger, there can also be a miracle take place within us. As we look upon this manger, God comes face to face with us personally. Here we discover that what counts is not what we have or what guilt we possess. What counts is our willingness to say Yes to Jesus the Christ. What counts is our decision to commit ourselves to him that decision makes us men. We can become men because we have seen God. We have seen God "for to us a Son is given, for to us a child is born."

AND THE CHILD GREW

Wesley P. Ford, Central Christian Church, Pasadena, California

A visitor in Nazareth during the year one may have seen a group of village musicians waiting with instruments ready to be played outside a little house. This familiar scene indicated that inside a child would soon be born. When someone came to the door and with great joy announced that the child was a boy, the musicians struck a merry tune. But if the announcement sorrowfully said that the new arrival was a girl, the musicians departed solemnly without a sound.

Here is another strange but interesting custom that belonged to the old world of the orient. Separated by time and distance and living under modern streamlined conditions, we do not readily comprehend the make-up of ancient homes. Then, by the family pattern, a boy would grow up to live in his father's household. Whatever he gained, including wife and children, would add to the strength of the family. A girl would someday leave the household to add her strength to that of another and maybe a rival family. So a boy was always more welcome.

Living for a summer in rural Japan gave me a new insight into those portions of the New Testament that have to do with home and childhood. Rural

homes in the orient seem not to have changed much from ancient patterns. Because the home of Jesus must have been a very important factor in shaping his life, we seek to reconstruct a Nazareth home in Jesus' day. We are familiar with the promise and the fact which says, "A child is born." The gospel of Luke suggests another very important fact without which the first would have little value, "And the child grew." We have talked much about the birth of Christ, but birth is not enough. Every man, even God's prophet, has a childhood. Factors in home and community do help to shape human destiny. So we look with interest to a first-century home in Nazareth.

I

Nazareth was a small town remote, inaccessible, and in many respects uncouth. It was surrounded by graceful hills. Many of its homes in Jesus' day were subterranean, hollowed out of the soft local limestone. Around it now are olive groves, vineyards, pomegranates, and low hills where sheep and goats graze. It was then so far removed from the commerce of the day and so lightly regarded that one asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" But we know that God works his miracles in a quiet way to bring good out of strange circumstances.

Though his father was a carpenter, the house in which Jesus lived probably was not new. A newly married couple settled in the home of the groom's parents which had been also that of his grandparents. It may have been a low, flat roofed adobe, or it may have been hollowed out of the natural limestone. The house which is now shown as that belonging to Joseph and Mary is of the latter style. The entrance to the one room is down a narrow stairway. There are no windows.

Bread, baked in hot ashes or on hot stones in small, flat loaves, was a chief item of food. The whole process, even the preparation of the wheat, was home-centered. Instead of a Betty Crocker mix, a bundle of cut wheat was brought to the home from which the mother began the bread making. Meat and milk and fruit in season were used regularly. Water was carried from the well. This, too, was a woman's work. The well, believed to be that from which Mary drew water, is still in use. Meals were served on low tables with members of the family seated on mats or cushions.

Boys and girls played as they do now. They imitated robbers, had play marriages and funerals, snared birds, and practiced archery. At night mattresses and covers were removed from the boxes and placed upon the floor. The father took his place first and the boys gathered around him; the girls, around the mother. Until the fifth year, a child's care was the mother's responsibility. Discipline was strict. Parents were honored and obeyed. Water was scarce and bathing was infrequent.

From the age of five to thirteen, father was responsible for the child. If a boy, the father was required to teach him the religion of Jehovah. This included memorizing the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. The learning took place in the home and also in the synagogue. At the synagogue, sitting on the ground around the scrolls of the law, children repeated the verses in unison until they knew them by heart. In Hebrew the same word means "repeat" and "learn." Here is an explanation of Jesus' profound knowledge of the Old Testament and of his ability to quote so frequently. And indeed here is a contrast to modern education which looks askance at memory work lest we learn something we do not wholly understand! I have not learned nearly as much as I should, but I am grateful for wise counsel which led me to commit some passages of scripture to memory.

If at thirteen the boy could pass the temple examination, he was recognized as a man and responsible then for his own conduct. By the time they were eighteen, boys were ready for marriage. But for us this privilege would seem a risk, for young people had little choice in selecting their mates. Choices were made by parents or relatives who did the bargaining, and it was common for young persons to come as complete strangers to the marriage vows.

II

Look now at some contrasts. Life in a first century home in Nazareth was hard and rugged compared to our pattern. Instead of using automatic washers and detergents they carried in buckets what little water they had, and made their own soap. In contrast to our cleanliness and conveniences, these homes would seem trying and even dirty. When Jesus took little children in his arms and blessed them, they were not dressed in Easter or dedication day finery. By our standards, we probably would call them dirty little urchins. But in spite of inconveniences, hardships, and just plain dirt, something good came out of a Nazareth home.

There is contrast, too, in loyalty. Homes were closely knit units. They were not established on our kind of romantic love, but on a loyalty borne out of duty. And we are compelled to ask, is the loyalty of duty stronger than the loyalty of love? There are evidence, too, that marriages arranged by others did sometimes grow into deep love.

And another contrast is at the point of worship. In the home there were prayers at sunup, at meal time, and at sundown. Even before a child could recite family prayers, he learned to point to the parchment kept in the little box near the door upon which was a written prayer. In a first century home in Nazareth there was probably little time for T.V. and radio, as longer hours were given to work, and time was spent in learning the law and in saying prayers.

III

When Luke says, "And the child grew," we must assume that it was in such a home as this. There are many things here that would not appeal to us and some from which we would turn away. But maybe our own homes with modern standards of comfort, cleanliness, and convenience miss some elements that gave stability and purpose to lives growing within the walls of primitive homes. We may have elegant houses and beautiful furniture, but these are not necessarily signs that we have learned how to live. We have served our physical comfort in a fashion that causes some to stand in awe. But there is something inside men and women, and boys and girls, which, in the midst of plenty, is being allowed to starve. There is a hunger in life even when it seems to have everything. Is it that we have filled our bodies and let our souls go hungry? Could it be that it is still a parent's first obligation to teach the laws of God?

By the pattern of life God cannot raise up even prophets without homes. "Unto us a child is born." That was God's promise fulfilled. God is the Creator of life; we are dependent. But birth is not enough. There must be growth to manhood, growth to Godliness, growth in sensitivity. For that God is dependent upon homes. So God and homes are forever linked together in the greatest enterprise on earth.

Hanna prayed that she might become a mother. When her prayer was answered, she remembered that she had prayed. Therefore, she said of her child, Samuel, "I have lent him to the Lord as long as he lives." She knew that she was but God's servant in the raising of a child not for herself but for God and for God's kingdom. Because of the devotion of his

mother, it was said of Samuel, "The boy continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord, and with men." It is God who does the lending. He is the Creator and His children are lent to families while the growing process takes place.

We do not know all that we would like to know about the home of Jesus, but we do know that there he "increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." There he developed a sensitivity to things of beauty. He saw the grain growing. He saw the barrenness of rocky places. He watched little children play. He knew about lost things and lost boys. He knew about honest toil and honest wages. At home he learned both tenderness and t r u s t. And through it all he saw God and he knew that God was good. Be it ever so humble, one home in Nazareth fulfilled its high purpose.

"A child is born." That is God's part. For creation we are dependent upon God. "And the child grew." That is the home's part. For growth God is dependent upon us! In the great enterprise of raising up prophets and of sharing the Savior of the world, God and homes are inseparably linked together.

FOUR PASTORAL PRAYERS

Lowell M. Atkinson, First Methodist Church, Englewood, New Jersey

I

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee that Thou has set the star of hope in our life's sky, that in the darkness we can see Thy brightness, that in times of shadow we can enjoy Thy leading and Thy guidance. We thank Thee that even in the days of Herod, this earth could hear the herald angels sing the glory that comes only from the heavenly realm to bring a brightness and a glow to this earth. We pray that the ancient miracle may be renewed in our own experience.

Give us the star of hope to light, to lead, to guide. Give us a faith in dark days to look for Thy bright stars. Give us a trust in that glory which lies beyond the things of earth and will bring transforming a n d transfiguring power even into the lives and experience of men. Wilt Thou grant Thy brightness to our minds, Thy wholesomeness to our spirits, Thy healing to our souls.

May we live for Thee with intelligence and with zeal and with healthy habits and with holy ways of conduct. Grant Thy presence in our hearts so that during this coming year we may live not only with new resolutions, but with high resolve; and not in our own strength, but in Thy glorious sufficiency; not trusting our own goodness, but believing mightily in Thy grace. Grant us Thy leading t h r o u g h this year. Grant us Thy strength for the facing of each day. And wilt Thou give to our fellowship in this church the touch of Thy glory.

Now we lift our prayer for the world's unfortunate, for those in our own community who have the sadness of sickness, for those who have the dejection that comes of discouragement and disillusionment in life's circumstance. We pray for those in other lands who have tasted bitterly of the cup of suffering and sorrow, who have not had the proper sustenance to support body and spirit. For the suffering people of this world, we lift our prayer. And grant that this day we may so give in thought and prayer and offering the help that comes from the heart that it will bring consolation and strength to many in Thy spirit.

Now wilt Thou enable us to rejoice with all who rejoice, to sorrow with those who sorrow. Wilt Thou give to our hearts the inner glow of hap-

piness of those who move in Thy presence under Thy guidance and in the glory of Thy grace. For these mercies we ask through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

II

Our Heavenly Father, we come into Thy presence rejoicing in the Christ Child who is also the King of all the world. We thank Thee for Him who a manger made His throne. We thank Thee for Him who has the right to rule in our lives. We come to worship Him and to adore Him, and we would take time to pause and to stand in awe and wonder at His Majesty.

We thank Thee that His word shall be established and shall never fail, that by His truth we dare to live, knowing we will not be betrayed. We thank Thee that the great ministry of redemption that He has accomplished gives our lives a solid and enduring foundation for time and eternity. And so we joy this day in the thought of one worthy to receive our homage and we give our loyalty to Him. Let Thy blessing be upon our worship and through the coming months may His will come first in our lives because He has the right to rule.

We ask Thy special blessing this day upon our young people. We pray for those who are now engaged on the quest of truth in various colleges. Wilt Thou give them the light of the kindled mind and the joy of adventuring in Thy truth. Bless those who speak to us today out of their own experience.

We pray that Thou would remember those who are in need of Thy pity and mercy because of their distresses. Let Thy grace be shed upon them. Wilt Thou be with the sick and those who are afflicted. Be with all who feel the heavy pressures of life. Be with those who are perplexed or bewildered or confused, and grant that Thy grace may be measured out to each according to his need.

Teach us to look to Thee in simple faith and trust. Teach us the inward happiness of rejoicing in Christ our King. Grant to us the outward power to make the right decisions day by day, that Thy will may be done, that in our lives Thy name may be hallowed, that because of us Thy kingdom may be stronger upon this earth. Abide with us and be in our homes.

For we ask these mercies in the Saviour's name, even Christ the Lord and King. Amen.

III

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we rejoice in the privilege of praise. We lift our prayers and our songs to Thee in adoration and thanksgiving for the wonder of Thy character. We rejoice that we are given so great a confidence because of Thy great goodness.

We bow before Thee in humility, recognizing our need to confess our sins and our wrong doings. Wilt Thou forgive us when we do the things that we should not do and when we fail to do the things that are at hand and should be done. Wilt Thou forgive us the unworthy thoughts which we have successfully concealed from the world. Wilt Thou cleanse us inwardly. Wilt Thou make our lives helpful, outwardly.

We lift our prayer in intercession for all those who are in particular need of Thy grace. Wilt Thou bless those who are sick. Wilt Thou be with those who have physical afflictions. Wilt Thou give guidance to the perplexed. Wilt Thou give strength to those who are weary. Especially we pray for those in position of responsibility in the nations of the world that they may truly lead us, under Thy guidance, into the ways of brotherliness and peace.

We pray that this day we may give ourselves anew in commitment to Thee through our Lord Jesus Christ. May the experience of consecration give a happy meaning to all this Christmastide, that Christ may be

born anew in our own experience, even as once He was born in the world of men.

Now wilt Thou give to all of our Christmas celebration a glowing center of peace where we are with Thee, rejoicing in our hearts that the Lord has come; that our Saviour is with us, who is the answer to all of our needs. In the joy of His presence, may we join in the angels' song.

Bless this time of worship, and grant that all that is done here may be acceptable in Thy sight. For we ask it in the Saviour's name. Amen.

IV

We rejoice in Thee, O God, and in the wonderful good news that Thou hast given to us for this Advent season. For the gladness of this time, for the joy that rings like bells in our minds, for the deep glow of happiness that is in our hearts, we give Thee praise! For Thou hast made the light to shine in our darkness. Thou hast marked out for us a clear path in our bewilderment and confusion. Thou hast reached out to us a saving hand when we were lost. Thou hast been to us a Redeemer and a Friend; and because we have learned to love Thee, we rejoice in the story of Christ, our Saviour.

We ask that Thy blessing may be upon our worship as we truly prepare our spirits to celebrate the time of the coming of our Lord. Once again may we renew the ancient expectancy of spirit. Once again may we lay hold upon the great central meaning of this Christmastide — the coming of Thyself in Jesus Christ, to bring light to a dark world and hope to a helpless people. Let our hearts sing with sacred gladness. Fill us with Thy spirit that we may count it our greatest joy to sing Thy praise and to witness to Thy truth.

Wilt Thou bless this time of worship, as we bring ourselves apart from the pressures and distractions of this world. Here may we find ourselves alone with Thee. Here may we find fresh perspective to assess our lives, to seek out their true meaning in relation to Thee. Here may we gather fresh zeal and enthusiasm to move with vigor and enterprise about the tasks of Thy kingdom. Forgive us our frailty and our failure. Forgive us that we permit our enthusiasms to sag. Forgive us when we are heedless in the presence of immediate opportunities to serve Thee. And wilt Thou so renew us in spirit that we may adequately show forth Thy praise not only with our lips but also with our deeds, and with the very quality of our lives. May others, looking upon us, know that we have been with Thee and that all of life for us has been set aglow.

Wilt Thou bless this church in all of its farflung program of worship and service and fellowship. Grant to it a mighty increase according to Thy wisdom and providence. Make fuller use of us as instruments of Thy sacred purpose. May the influence of this church reach out across the land and across the sea as our prayers and our gifts bring the strength and the healing touch of the Gospel to places of need. Wilt Thou strengthen in our lives every wholesome thought and cleanse out of our spirits all that is unworthy. Keep us ever ready, disciplined, and fit as soldiers of our King, in whose name we lift this prayer. Amen.

ALL THINGS MAY BE NEW

Lester L. Haws, First Methodist Church, Yonkers, N. Y.

It doesn't matter how often you run the poker through burnt out embers — you'll never get a flame. The fire has gone out, and you will not have warmth until you relight the fire.

It doesn't matter how long you cry over the failures of the past year — no amount of tears will bring back those 365 days to be re-lived. They are gone forever.

Burnt out embers — "dear, dead days beyond recall" — are symbols of our greater need. Let the curtain fall on what is past.

One thing you will carry out of the theater of last year's drama will be your memories, both good and bad. I hope that you will remember the mistakes you made, but for only one reason — that you will not make the same mistakes again. A father had a wayward son. The father talked to the boy, scolded him, spanked him, but could not change him. One day the father had an idea. He gave his son a brand new piece of board. "Son," said the father, "every time you do what is wrong drive a nail in this board, and every time you do something that is good draw one out." The son said that he would. As the days went by, the boy had quite a number of nails driven in the board. A series of good days saw some of the nails drawn out. The boy was disturbed, however, and said to his father: "Dad, I'm sorry that I did what was wrong. I have pulled a few nails out of the board, but I can't pull the nail holes out."

The wrong that we sow does have its mark. The only way to keep our life's boards in perfect shape is not to drive any nails of wrong into it. With the coming of each new day determine that you will p e r f o r m deeds of goodness. Thus will you keep your life unmarred from wrong.

The year stands here before us
Offering its wares of days;
The choice is that of chaos
Or God's renewing ways.

Choose well the right God offers
In fear draw not away;
Accept the life He offers
To live a better day.

I

Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote, "The old order changeth, yielding place to the new." What is the "old"? It may refer to wrong attitudes, wrong ambitions, wrong ideas, wrong purposes that you had in your life. Possibly you still hold on to that which is wrong. My plea to you on this New Year's Day is to let go of the wrong, and accept the right.

Most persons will admit that they are imperfect persons. Our imperfections are different, but all must claim a share. St. Paul, who once described himself as "the greatest of sinners," said, "If a man be in Christ, he is a new creation." This is one of the finest definitions there is of a Christian. St. Paul is saying nothing less is adequate because an inner change in man is equivalent to a "new creation." You can't patch-up morals. You can't splice broken promises. A man in Christ is a "new creation." He is entirely changed spiritually. He acquires "the mind of Christ."

If you challenge the possibility of becoming a "new creation in Christ," take a fresh look at the world and remember that God is its Creator. The world is ever new. The law has never been changed. "There is seedtime and

harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night" (Gen. 8:22).

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: "The perpetual admonition of Nature to us is: The world is new, untried. Do not believe in the past. I give you the universe new and unhandled every hour. You think in your idle hours that there is literature, history, science, behind you so accumulated as to exhaust thought and prescribe your own future and the future. In your sane hour you shall see that not a line has yet been written; that for all the poetry that is in the world your first sensation on entering a wood or standing on the shore of a lake has not been chanted yet. It remains for you, so does all thought, all object, all life remain unwritten still."

II

Out of suffering God brings His new creation. It took a Cross to produce the Christian era. Jesus Christ suffered and died that you and I might have "new life." Why, then, should we misunderstand the purposes of suffering and death in our personal lives.

When the hammer of some great tragedy falls on you, there comes great depression. Even the deeply religious person does not escape. The sentiment of the Christian is expressed by the victim of a recent tragedy who said in an interview, "We live by hope." Tennyson was grief-stricken when the husband of his sister and his dearest friend, Arthur Hallam, died. Hallam was only twenty-two. Tennyson enshrined his love for Hallam in his poem, "In Memoriam." For sixteen years Tennyson wrote the poem, s e a r c h i n g through the years to know the meaning of death and life. His grief in time gave way to doubt, and in the end he learned that the love of God is always new and there came a reconciliation with God.

Written into "In Memoriam" is the hymn, "Ring out, wild bells, to the wild, wild sky . . . . The year is dying in the night . . . . Ring out the old, ring in the new . . . . Ring out the false, ring in the true." Ring out the old grief and doubt. Ring out the old struggle to accept death as a part of the universe. These must be replaced with joy and faith. We must know that goodness and right are destined to overcome evil. "Ring out a slowly dying cause."

Causes are dying so slowly because so few people are ready to dedicate themselves to hasten the process. The apathy that keeps you from doing your just part through your church and "all good causes" must be changed. Sing with Tennyson, "Ring out false pride in place and blood, The civic leader slander and the spite; Ring in the love of truth and right, Ring in the common love of good."

Go to your church. Volunteer your life for the cause of right. Join the procession of those heroes and heroines who have already done their part to "Ring in the Christ that is to be."

Let us resolve with Bishop William A. Quayle: "By God's help I mean this year to live the better life. I will pray much, will stir myself up to answer my own prayers, will be slow in finding fault in others, will love man and will love ardently, will enjoy jostling in the throngs of busy people, will answer to my nobler impulses, will enjoy people, will keep alive my sense of wonder, will attempt to be in myself daily an invitation of human-kind to Christ, will put myself where the winds of God will blow across my heart and strive to live so cleanly and so valiantly as that if I live not to see the sunrise of another year, I may see the sunrise of eternity unabashed unafraid, even elated; for to live shall be Christ, but to die shall be gain, infinite and everlasting."

TURNING CORNERS

Gene E. Bartlett, Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Rochester, New York

It is a common theme of poem and song that life is like a road. There are times when it is rough and times when it is smooth. At the same time, we may walk with the crowds or go a lonely way. But one thing more must be added. If life is like a road, then it is one with many turns. We can rarely see more than a little way ahead, because there is a corner waiting for us there.

One has only to turn to his Bible to see how our faith in God, who has disclosed Himself in Christ, comes face to face with this necessity of turning corners. So often is it a part of the Bible witness that you have to make a choice among many statements of faith. The 139th Psalm is the affirmation of a man reaching out in his mind to understand the dimensions of God's love.

Before he is through, he has measured every dimension, the height and depth, the near and far, the day and the night, the dark and the light. And he adds these words, "Even there shall thy hand lead me."

Certainly any sensitive person would welcome a faith like that. It can be ours, of this I am sure. To come to it we shall need to face one or two matters which help to make it more clear.

I

At the outset, life being what it is, we must come to terms with some common alternatives to that faith which will have to be given up. While the assurance, "Even there shall thy hand lead me," is very real, it is not by any means the only way we turn our corners.

Sometimes, for example, we try to do it by walking backwards. It was a real tendency which Emerson described in us when he said, "We are idolaters of the old . . . we do not believe that there is any force in today to rival or recreate that beautiful yesterday."

Some of us take this outlook upon our religious faith. We somehow assume that the faith of our childhood is more real than that which we could find in our maturity. When we remember Christ we think of Him as we knew Him as a child. We sing, "Faith of our fathers living still," but not as readily, "My faith looks up to Thee." In some ways it is easier to have memory than responsibility.

Have you tried going back to that home town that your romanticize in your memory? My brother and I did just that a few months ago. We returned to the town where we lived as boys and to the farm where we spent our summers. There was a very strange feeling about it. Somehow it seemed to have shrunk! There was a definite gap between my memory and the reality. It gave support to the old proverb, "No use looking for the birds of this year in the nests of last." Yet, we do walk backwards, looking at the last turn in life rather than the one which is ahead.

Or again, we sometimes turn the corner before we get to it. That's a particular temptation as we stand on the threshold of a New Year.

This sermon runs easily to reminiscences today, so let me draw upon my own childhood experience again. Our boyhood home was a hundred miles away from my grandfather's farm. In the early days of our family life we would drive there, and it took us all day. Many of the roads had not been paved. Now there was one hill called "Murphy's Hill." Whenever it rained it was slippery and treacherous. It was forty miles away, but we hardly were out of the garage until my mother began to worry about Murphy's Hill. I am sure she never took a deep breath until we were over the top of it. Moreover, even after cars were improved and the

roads were paved, the old habit remained. She still worried about Murphy's Hill all the forty miles from our home to its peak.

While you smile at my family, do it tolerantly, for, I am sure we are not alone in this. In far more serious ways we are described by Edwin Markham:

> The millions bearing the double load,
> The fate of today and the fear of tomorrow.

The very word translated "anxious" in the New Testament has a basic Greek meaning, to be "drawn in two directions." It is our greatest temptation, the most widespread denial of our faith. We insist upon turning corners before we get to them.

Or again, some of us try to carry too much as we go along. Do you really doubt that no small part of the drive that sends us helter skelter these days is the search for something that will give security? In our society we do not seek for success or money or power or getting ahead just because we find enjoyment in these things. I am convinced that we seek them, in part, to solve our deep spiritual needs. We don't know what lies around the next corner so we try to get enough things to take with us to be ready for whatever may come.

Undoubtedly, some say in their minds, hearing words like these, Well, what's wrong with that? And the answer is clear. Nothing is wrong as long as we do not try to let these take the place which rightfully belongs only to God. We do not find our peace or assurance or the welfare of our souls in anything but our utter reliance upon God.

II

We are now ready to see the Christian alternative. It can be simply stated: Relying upon God, we can turn the corners with confidence.

As a matter of fact, there is a wonderful democracy about this Christian faith, because it is given to those who will receive it. If confidence rested upon the acquiring of things, some of us could afford it and others couldn't. If confidence were the result of a certain kind of success, only a few could have it. But when it is the gift of God, it is given to all. That faith to face the future can be offered to everyone here because it is free. It rests neither upon your ability to buy it nor your merit in deserving it. It is God's gift born of His love and directed to our need.

A pastor making a call took his small son with him. The little lad was left downstairs while his father went up to the sickroom where a man was critically ill. The man faced with death pressed the question with his pastor, What is the life to come to be like? What can we expect? Just at that moment the little boy, tired of waiting downstairs, came up looking for his father and knocked at the door of the room. The pastor saw in this a means of answering the anxious question. He said to the other man, You see, my son has never been in this room before. He doesn't know what is in here, but he does know who is here. He knows his father is here, so he knocks at the door to come in.

At every corner, even those other than death, that's where our faith is placed. No man knows what the year to come will bring. But every man may know that God is there.

That means several practical things to help us on the way. Surely, it brings the assurance that the strength given will be sufficient for the day or the experience. F. W. Boreham, looking back upon his life, has said that he was impressed by the way in which the strength of the day was always equal to the length of the day. That's a very practical part of our believing that God's hand leads us.

A Chinese fable stated it in another way. It told of a man who had to cross a high hill every day. Each

time he crossed it he took a stone from the top of the hill and carried it to the bottom. When asked about this strange action, he said: "I am moving this hill. Not in my lifetime or in my son's, but in time this hill will go." That's a practical part of turning the corner with faith. It's the assurance that a little at a time strength will be given as we need it.

Moreover, it finds hope in the fact that the future is uncertain. Why do we always look upon this as something to be dreaded? We can be grateful in some ways that the future is uncertain. We should, indeed, be in despair if there were conclusive proof that the future is going to be what some of us fear in this atomic age. A part of our hope is in the fact that the future is uncertain. For God has His ways of turning it to His ends. What wonderful surprises lie ahead as they have in the past. Cellini was a great diarist. Yet, writing in 1492 he didn't even bother to mention that Columbus had discovered a new continent. He thought that was of no importance. What of that day when the French Revolution broke out? Louis XVI, apparently unaware of its significance, entered in his diary a single French word, "rien" which means "nothing." A revolution breaking out, a new continent discovered, the people who were there looking at them didn't see their significance. It is most certainly true here today. As we have been within this week to a manger place again, which proved more powerful than the whole throne of Rome, so we will one day look back to the things we thought important to discover that they have been far overshadowed by something God was working out all the time. This is our faith. It is very real.

THE CUP OF THE NEW COVENANT

Earl Cranston, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts

Every New Year brings new hopes and evaluations. Today is the first Sunday after New Year's Day, and also the first Sunday after Epiphany which is the twelfth day after Christmas, and traditionally the date of the visit of the Wise Men. Certain Near Eastern Christians consider it the more authentic date for Christmas itself; it also is regarded as the day, thirty years later, of the Baptism of Jesus. In many ways this present period, the opening of the year, means a fresh beginning for Christians everywhere, an appropriate occasion for observing the Lord's Supper.

The twelve disciples viewed that first communion as part of their accepted Jewish religion, a heritage centered in the Covenant or two-way agreement made by God with Abraham, Moses, and later leaders. God had chosen the Hebrews; if they understood and served him he would bless and prosper them. Jesus, however, gave this Passover ceremony an unexpected turn when he said: "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood." The idea of sacrifice, always important to the Jews, was thus raised to unique prominence. The term "New Covenant" came not from Moses or Elijah or Isaiah, but from Jeremiah, a major prophet whose life in its ideals, triumphs, and disappointments most nearly foreshadowed the Master's. Jesus frequently adopted the spirit and words of that prophet. The son of a priest, Jeremiah, beginning his mature life under the favorable rule of young King Josiah, had repelled but finally accepted an inner call to serve his God, even though this meant rejection and tragedy. Before his country came to face heavy problems, he welcomed the discovery in the temple of what appeared to

be a most liberal ancient law covenant, the injunctions of which were unheeded by most of his people. Soon thereafter, four strong military powers fought and played power politics around Jerusalem. King Josiah was assassinated; Jerusalem fell to an eastern invader. Its citizens either went as captives to Babylon, fled to Egypt or elsewhere, or scratched the barren soil of their plundered city and fields.

At some point in this desolate process Jeremiah delivered the doctrine of the New Covenant. Unlike the Old Covenant it would be personal rather than national, available to such individuals as m i g h t discern God's ways, place his law in their hearts, understand for themselves the power of the spirit, and receive forgiveness. Instead of seeking to regain and rule a temporal kingdom, the Jews scattered throughout the world might through adversity and vision remake themselves and mankind. Jeremiah's ungrateful countrymen are supposed to have killed him, but six centuries later the Master made his deeper meaning the explanation of the Last Supper, the model for all time.

A few hours afterward Jesus was arrested, tried and executed. His disciples, however, soon went out to rejuvenate and purify the religious and political standards of the succeeding centuries.

With this present New Year, the Christian faith can reassert the New Covenant in an age as complex and potentially desperate as that of its founding. The individual may accept the New Covenant in his heart, and enter a fresh approach upon life. Churches for themselves, in their denominations, and in ecumenical associations can transcend barriers and legalistic restraints by discovering a new spiritual drive and unity. Social and political groups under older and well-established governments would do well to counsel and inspire newly-freed peoples, b o t h through the United Nations and outside it, that they may attain recognized status, liberty, justice, and peace. Whatever lies ahead in this year, the Christians of America, empowered to withstand both the temptations of prosperity and any calamities which may lead them through the valley of the shadow of death, may rightfully come at this Epiphany season and any later time to the Supper of the Lord, with renewed i n s i g h t and dedication. There the Master may seem again to be present, giving the cup of the New Covenant to all who are able to receive it.

BOOKS FOR PULPIT PREACHING—from page 2

Seagrave, and Dooley. Here are those who have kept bright the flame of witnessing, and their words and lives, transcribed with affectionate appreciation by Dr. Bowie, will greatly inspire young and older Christians. (Harper & Brothers, 244 pp., $3.95)

Son of Man by Leslie Paul has been published in this country after having been generously acclaimed abroad. The author hopes that the volume may help readers to rediscover the real and human Jesus. Bringing into focus the total background against which the Gospel story was recorded, Dr. Paul gives added dimensions to familiar words. "The total ministry of Jesus," he writes, "needs more elbow-room than the scholars are prepared to award it." In like manner, the author broadens the bases for our understanding and knowledge. The book will especially appeal to laymen, although pastors will find here rich veins of thought and contemplation. (E. P. Dutton & Co., 287 pp., $4)

More Preaching Values in the Epis-

tles of Paul by Halford E. Luccock may well be the author's last contribution to the pastor's library. For many years preceding his recent death, Dr. Luccock was perhaps the most widely quoted preacher, for he possessed the rare capacity of finding meaning in all facets of life's experience and he framed his ideas in memorable and original language. This book includes 155 sermonettes on the best known as well as the less frequently preached texts from Paul's letters. Pastors will return again and again to these pages. (Harper & Brothers, 255 pp., $3.95)

WORTH QUOTING from page 2

as we search for open doors.

—Elizabeth Dillard

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The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold a man's foot long enough to enable him to put the other somewhat higher. —T. H. Huxley

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Some minds are like concrete; mixed up and permanently set.

—Ralph Sander

* * *

Noise proves nothing; often a hen who has merely laid an egg cackles as if she had laid an asteroid.

—Mark Twain

* * *

The complete will of God appears to those willing to do that part of his will which is already perfectly plain. Just as the light goes on ahead, illuminating the dark path as we go forward with a lantern, so the will of God makes clear the second step once we have taken the first. He who determines to do the known duty, discovers that the obscure duty becomes plain immediately thereafter. None of us needs to see the whole way, if at least one forward step is perfectly plain.

Let any person who is confused be sure of two things: (1) If one duty is perfectly clear then our course is laid out for us, and we can co-operate with God or defy him. There is no other choice. (2) If our duty is not perfectly plain, then we need not move until God has made it plain. It often happens that the highest dedication requires us to "wait upon the Lord." —Roy L. Smith

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Two young men were digging a ditch in the Negev Desert of Israel under the blistering sun. One of them, hearing the other mumbling, turned around and saw his friend leaning on his pick. He heard him murmur, "Oh, that Moses! that Moses!" Alarmed he asked, "Has the sun got you? Why are you talking about Moses?" The other muttered, "Oh, that Moses! If he hadn't stopped here, we could be on the Riviera."

This is our situation. If things were better, they wouldn't be as bad as they are. This little anecdote, born of life in difficult circumstances, points up our need to curb wishful thinking and come down to bed-rock reality. It takes great effort to pick up problems and examine them, rather than transfer our frustrations to a scapegoat. —Richard C. Hottelet

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Some people may love you because you are you, but most people like you for the way you act.

—Maria W. Piers

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The small boy next door is understandably confused. He passed his first grade exams with flying colors last spring, and now they call him a second grader.

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It is most important to be pushing, but it is fatal to seem so.

—Benjamin Jowett

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There is nothing to which education is subordinate save more education. —John L. Childs

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In the conditions of modern life the rule is absolute, the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed. Not all your heroism, not all your social charm, not all your wit, not all your victories on land or at sea, can move back the finger of fate. Today we maintain ourselves. Tomorrow science will have moved forward yet one more step, and there will be no appeal from the judgment which will then be pronounced on the uneducated.

—Alfred North Whitehead

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Among the safe courses, the safest of all is to doubt.

—Spanish proverb

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The main job of parents is to work themselves out of a job. This requires a gradual letting go on their part and a gradual taking over on the part of the children. If children try to take hold without parents letting go, there are fireworks. If parents let go without children taking hold, we have floundering and confusion. If parents don't let go and children either don't try or are unable to take hold, the result is lifelong dependency and immaturity. But if the letting go and the taking hold occur simultaneously and gradually over a long period, the transition from parents' control to self-control will be a smooth one, achieved without serious crises.

Letting go is a fine art that some parents never master. It isn't easy to cut down on a precious and important job. After being the center of the young child's world, loved and looked up to, it is a shock for parents to be challenged, criticized, and even defied. This is rough on the ego. Moreover, we are afraid that if we let go, the young will make mistakes and get into trouble. It is natural to want to hold fast and protect the child from error. Nevertheless we must strive to build responsibility within the child from the earliest years and then trust him. If parents were less concerned with obedience as such and more concerned with developing responsibility, they would find children more cooperative.

—Harold T. Christensen

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Life is so full of living — so active, so present, that the greatest achievements of yesterday are often overshadowed by minor accomplishments of the hour. It would be a wonderful thing if each life could end on the day of its highest peak. But it is not given man to choose the time of his going. Some linger long after the spark of life has cooled into ashes. The tragedy of living too long is that the pathos of age too often obscures the memory of a life's vital work.

—Emma Kidd Hulbert

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Alone we can do little. Separated, we are units of weakness; but aggregated we become batteries of power. —Frances E. Willard

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Who has not awakened in the middle of the night to hear a bell strike in the heart — and it is now too late to do what we had planned to do, for we have dallied? The child you meant to help is now grown, the friend is now gone, the harvest is past, the night is now come, and winter seals the door. Across the heart's dark there is a flooding light that reveals with strange clarity the very path we have missed, though we had vowed to take it on a day that passed, and the future went that way.

—Jean Kenyon MacKenzie

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A failure needn't be the end of the world if the man learns how to rebound. In fact, people tend to rally around and support the fellow who shows he can meet disaster by bouncing back and doing his best.

—George S. Odiorne